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SUMMARY

The Yaruros are river nomads, practicing no agriculture and keeping no domestic animals except the dog. Their material culture is meager, being limited to what they can carry in their canoes as they wander from one camp to another. Expecting extermination within a short time, they have turned to life after death for consolation.

We know practically nothing of the Yaruros as they were several hundred years ago. According to the missionary accounts they had a simpler culture than the other tribes inhabiting the region of the delta of the Apure. However, lacking descriptions of the Yaruros, we cannot make sound comparisons. There is very little in the modern Yaruro culture which resembles that of the Otomacos and Tamanacos as described in the missionary accounts.

The things that distinguish the Yaruros from Racionales (as the "civilized" people are known) are lack of permanent abodes, no domestic animals, and no agriculture. The things that are common to both groups are the bow and arrow, the canoe and paddle, and hunting. Among the Yaruros there is a closer communal life than among the Racionales.

In the material culture of the Yaruros we can discover but few elements which have been borrowed from the Europeans. Of these, the use of iron is the most important. Formerly the Yaruros had only bone and wood out of which to shape arrow points, but now iron has displaced these other primitive materials. The use of iron knives, an occasional ax, a hammer, and a heavy iron hoe used by the women on their digging sticks, has, of course, been introduced by the traders. In exchange for these elements the Yaruros have given to the Racionales the bow and arrow, the canoe, the gourd rattle, basketry, and pottery.

The Yaruro in recent years has been even further removed from European culture than he was several centuries ago. The policy of the late dictator, Gen. Juan Vicente Gomez, of disarming the Venezuelans to keep down revolutions, left the people of the llanos without any ammunition, even though they might have old shotguns and rifles. Guns and ammunition were smuggled in at a premium and were far beyond the means of the Llanero peasant and cowboy. As a result, those who were not attached to the household of some powerful absentee rancher were forced to eke out a living with bow and arrow.

The world depression and the cattle monopoly of General Gomez affected the Llaneros also in two ways. Cattle could no longer be sold at a profitable price and the workers were forced either to abandon the country and withdraw to the cities or to Guiana, to become farmers, or to live in an even more primitive style than they

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were accustomed to. That is, they had to fall back on a life somewhat similar to that of the Yaruros. Today one finds close to some river bank a little hut, the home of one of these Llaneros. In such a household one may find a man, his wife, and children. Their only possessions are what they can gather and make from their environment. They may have a garden in which they raise plantains and bananas, a little maize, and yucca. But the soil of the Llaneros is not fit for fertile gardens, so these people have to depend on hunting and fishing for most of their food. These are the people with whom the Yaruro have most contact. There is nothing in their houses and nothing in their mode of living to attract the Yaruro. As a matter of fact the Yaruros themselves made the comment that a Racionale's house was dirty and full of vermin and insect life, whereas they, preferring to live on the open beaches behind no shelter, had the advantage of moving about from one clean camp site to another.

How much the Yaruros have borrowed from Spanish lore and religious ideas it is impossible to say on a basis of our knowledge. In their religious ideas one might guess that the conception of the existence of an evil spirit and the personality of India Rosa may be the two strongest elements. All these, however, were introduced a long time ago and with the breaking off of communication with the missionaries during the past century they have become weaker and weaker. Today India Rosa is confused with Kuma. The evil spirit appears in only one or two legends and plays hardly any part in the shamanistic performances.

The tenor of the Yaruro culture is typically conservative. Their reaction to any European idea is one of suspicion and fear. For instance, they will not raise domestic animals or learn to cultivate gardens. The Yaruros had their chance, they say, when the world was created, and refused to take it. Now there is only one thing left to them: to live as their ancestors have done and to die.

This patient acceptance of their lot is the most characteristic attitude of the Yaruros. They have abandoned all hope of maintaining themselves against the destructive forces of the world around them, and even of dying out peaceably. Their only consolation lies in their firm belief that Kuma is waiting for them in the other world. In other words, not unlike many other American aboriginal groups, they have built for themselves an indestructible heaven, and one from which foreign peoples will be excluded. There they will recapture their ancient mode of life. They will have plenty of food, clothing, horses, and the companionship of their relatives. Kuma's land is a world of bliss, an expression, really, of the living Yaruro's yearning to be allowed to hunt, fish, and live peacefully with each